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House of Representatives VETERANS BENEFITS ACT OF 2003

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2297, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003. This bill contains many improvements in the benefits for our Nation's veterans and for their survivors and dependents.

One important provision of this legislation that I would like to highlight will positively affect many Filipino veterans of World War II who are living in the United States, as well as their survivors. Many of my colleagues know that in 1946, Congress unfairly rescinded the benefits of many Filipino veterans and cut in half the benefits of many others--those who were service-connected disabled veterans. This limitation on compensation benefits was intended to reflect the difference in the cost of living between the Philippines and the United States.

But in the 60 years since World War II, a large number of Filipino veterans and their dependents have immigrated to our country. As citizens or permanent residents, these disabled Filipino veterans face living expenses comparable to those of United States veterans. Limiting their benefits has caused hardships for these disabled veterans and for their survivors who are receiving DIC (disability indemnity compensation). To fix this inequity, this bill eliminates the ``50 cents on the dollar amount" that they are currently receiving and restores full payment of their compensation benefits.

In addition, it extends burial benefits in national cemeteries for the Filipino World War II veterans living in the United States who, to this date, did not have these benefits--namely, the New

(over)

Philippine Scouts. And the bill provides other in-kind and monetary burial benefits to these deserving veterans.

I am elated that, with this legislation, my colleagues are addressing the 60-year-long injustice to Filipino soldiers who lived in a territory of the United States and fought side-by-side with our soldiers from the mainland during World War II. Without their vital participation in this war, the outcome might have been entirely different!

Combined with H.R. 2357, which has passed the House and which improves access to VA medical facilities for Filipino World War II veterans who live in the United States, we are clearly making progress. I sincerely thank the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee

(Mr. Smith) and the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House VA Benefits and Health Subcommittees (Mr. Simmons, Mr. Brown, Mr. Rodriguez, and Mr. Michaud) for their assistance in putting these bills forward. And a special thank you to my colleague, VA Committee Ranking Member Lane Evans who, with me, at a Veterans Town Hall Meeting in San Diego County ten years ago, heard first-hand the moving story of the injustices affecting Filipino World War II veterans, voted into law by the 1946 Congress. We heard this story from one veteran who had survived the Bataan Death March. From that moment, he has been my ally in this fight to restore justice and equity. I thank him for his unfailing support.

My colleagues, please join me in voting for H.R. 2297